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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 013477

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SUBJECT: PARTY INTELLECTUAL SEES "LEFTIST" LEANINGS AMONG LEADERSHIP, BUT RANK AND FILE DRIVEN BY MONEY

REF: A. BEIJING 3852

1B. BEIJING 4681

Classified By: Classified by Acting Political Internal Unit Chief Susan A. Thornton. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

11. (C) In a recent meeting with Poloffs, high-profile Party intellectual Ma Licheng (protect) maintained that it is too early to speculate about leadership maneuvering for next fall's 17th party congress. However, he provided a general readout on political dynamics at the top of the Party. In Ma's view, the center of gravity in the Politburo Standing Committee remains on the left of the political spectrum, but there are no serious fissures dividing its members. He painted a general portrait of a Party devoid of idealism whose elites as well as rank and file members are motivated primarily by pursuit of material benefit and personal advancement. End Summary.

Leadership Dynamics

12. (C) Ma, a longtime embassy contact, is a former senior editor at the Central Committee's flagship paper, People's Daily, and a member of the Party. He was forced to retire from the paper because of his controversial views three years ago. Ma would not speculate about political maneuvering related to the 17th Party Congress, stating that it is too early in the process and that even knowledgeable Chinese observers are in the dark, but discounted rumors of serious fissures within the top leadership. He said that Hu Jintao and Zeng Qinghong are still cooperating in the interest of Party stability and that Hu remained very respectful of Jiang Zemin. He also said, in response to Poloff's question on the role of provincial Party leaders and Central Committee members in deliberations over the new Politburo lineup, that they are not consulted in advance of top-level personnel decisions. "They don't even dare ask about such things," Ma declared.

13. (C) Ma painted a picture of a strongly left-leaning Politburo Standing Committee presiding over a party characterized by a small "reform" faction (gaige pai) at one pole, including himself, and an unreconstructed "leftist" faction at the other pole (zuo pai), with the majority falling somewhere in the middle. Ma claimed that the true leaning of Hu Jintao and most of the Politburo Standing Committee was toward the left, although Wen Jiabao was "slightly better" and Zeng Qinghong was the most reformist of the middle group. Hu backs the reform faction when it

suits his purposes, primarily in support of further market reforms, but he fears that the reformist's agenda of political reform will bring the Party down. Political reform remains the main fault line and the majority of the top leadership favor continued tight control over information and political activity.

Ideological Contradictions

¶4. (C) Ma provided a very cynical interpretation of the highly-publicized efforts of Hu and other leaders to refurbish the image of a badly tarnished Marxist ideology, particularly of the recent upsurge in political assertiveness by intellectuals on the left. In Ma's view, both veteran Marxists and younger "New Left" academics are attempting to curry favor with the left-leaning leadership in a bid for official status and material reward. Ma said that the prominent Marxist economist Liu Guoguang, a former Central Committee member and current advisor to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, was rewarded with a large house by the General Office of the Central Committee for his recent role in leading the effort to resurrect Marxism and attack the views of market reformers (reftels). Ma foresees no crisis of ideology within the Party's large middle "faction" in the future as the gap between formal ideology and authoritarian politics on the one hand, and market economic policies on the other, continues to widen. All major players, he said, accept the political imperative of giving lip service to ideology in the interest of Party legitimacy.

The Only Game in Town

BEIJING 00013477 002 OF 002

¶5. (C) Ma said the Party is proportionately bigger now than in the past and has no trouble attracting recruits, including among the best and brightest, even though idealism is a thing of the past. The pursuit of wealth, status and the good life is the primary motivation among Chinese youth and they join the Party because it remains the premier channel for achieving these goals. The fact that China is still a very backward country amplifies these aspirations. Ma is optimistic that the Party will be able to share the fruits of economic prosperity more broadly, noting recent policy initiatives to increase incomes and lower housing costs, in order to keep this dream alive. This fact, coupled with memories of the Tiananmen crackdown and the awareness that the Party has the capacity, and the will, to crush resistance, augurs in favor of a long shelf-life for the Party elite, even as the Party gradually evolves into a different type of political organization. In today's China, as in the past, becoming a "guan" (official) is the route to the top.

Charity Begins at Home

¶6. (C) In illustration of the role that expediency and money now play in the internal life of the party, Ma disclosed that the Party Committee of Beijing University had recently launched the career of a student party member who had made a substantial donation to the Committee (20,000 RMB) prior to graduation. After Chinese media publicized her act of generosity, calling her a model Party member, she received job offers from five top organizations. In response to her request, the University Party Committee found her a position as a journalist in Hong Kong. When she returned to Beijing after complaining

that the job was "too difficult," she was able to land another promising position with a finance company.

Comment

¶7. (C) Although Ma no longer has direct access to the information flow he once enjoyed as a senior editor at People's Daily, he remains well-connected through his many friends and contacts in the Party. His cynical views on the growing influence of rampant materialism and personal interest in the Party and his explanation of its staying power echo views we have heard from other well-placed intellectuals.

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